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SPECIAL REPORT

Democrats Work to Ensure the Continued Success of Public Schools

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Democrats Work to Ensure the Continued Success of Public Schools

Throughout this century, America's public schools have provided opportunities for millions of Americans from all backgrounds and laid the foundation for our economic success. Students are making progress in improving achievement in both reading and math, a higher percentage of high school students are graduating, more students are taking advanced courses, and an increasing number of students are pursuing higher education.

Although many of the Nation's public schools provide excellent educational experiences for students, much more work needs to be done. The escalating demands of the global economy and the expansion of the Information Age means that our Nation's continued success depends on an ongoing commitment to our public schools.

Democrats are committed to strengthening public schools through the reauthorization of the *Elementary Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) to ensure that it holds students to high academic standards and holds schools accountable for results. In addition, Democrats will continue to tackle critical challenges such as over crowded classrooms, out-of-date and unsafe school facilities, the shortage of well-qualified teachers, and the lack of high quality after-school programs.

Reinvestment in Public Education

On May 19, 1999, the President released the *Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999*, the Administration's proposal to reauthorize the ESEA. The *Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999*, reaffirms the Federal Government's role in helping States and local communities to promote academic excellence and educational opportunities for every American child. The proposal will strengthen accountability for results, improve teacher quality, increase school safety, help all children meet high standards, and promote school reform.

Accountability for results. The *Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999* includes accountability measures to ensure that school districts and States are achieving results. The legislation will require States and school districts to:

- identify failing schools and intervene to turn them around with steps such as intensive teacher training, extended learning opportunities, and other proven approaches to school reform;
- empower parents by issuing school report cards which would include information on student achievement, teacher qualifications, class size, school safety, attendance and graduation rates;
- put qualified teachers in the classroom by requiring performance examinations for all new teachers and strengthening teacher certification standards;
- adopt and enforce sound, fair discipline policies; and
- end social promotion and help all students to meet challenging standards by supporting students who need extra help; hiring 100,000 teachers to reduce class size; and providing afterschool and summer school learning programs.

Improve teacher quality. The proposal includes several measures to improve teacher quality and put more highly trained teachers into America's public schools, including:

- providing the tools and training teachers need to teach to high standards;
- expanding teacher recruitment and retention efforts; and
- ensuring that there are qualified teachers in high poverty schools.

Increase school safety. The proposal challenges States, communities, and schools to take steps to restore order and safety, such as adopting school uniforms, enforcing truancy laws, and imposing curfews. This proposal also:

- strengthens the Safe, Disciplined and Drug-free Schools program;
- requires assessment and counseling for students who bring guns to school;

- requires the reporting of gun and drug incidents to parents; and
- provides a Federal emergency response plan to violence.

Democrats Build on Previous Successes

The goal of the *Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999* is to build on the success of the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA. The historic changes in the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA led States and local communities toward ensuring that students are required to meet high academic standards. As a result of the legislation, 48 States completed the development of State content standards for all children, and two other States promoted challenging standards at the local level.

In addition to raising academic standards for students, Democrats streamlined the Federal role in education. The 1994 reauthorization of ESEA called for significant changes in the way the Department of Education interacts with States and local schools.

- The 1994 reauthorization of ESEA resulted in the elimination of two-thirds of ESEA regulations.
- The reauthorization also established an option permitting States to submit a single, consolidated State application, instead of separate applications. States reported in FY 1996 that the consolidated application slashed paperwork requirements by 85 percent.
- The Department of Education has vigorously implemented the waiver provisions included in the 1994 reauthorization, which permits States, school districts, and schools to request waivers of statutory and regulatory requirements. Currently, the Department has received 648 requests for waivers—85 percent of all these requests were approved or withdrawn because the waivers were deemed unnecessary.
- As part of Goals 2000, Democrats initiated a pilot program called Ed-Flex to allow States to waive certain requirements for Federal education programs if they interfere with State and local efforts to improve education. The Ed-Flex program was recently expanded to allow all qualified States to participate.

Student Achievement is Increasing

Student performance is rising across the Nation, according to many indicators. Performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has increased, particularly in reading, math, and science—critical subjects for success in learning.

- Average reading scores increased from 1994 to 1998 in all three grades tested (4, 8, and 12).
- Average performance in math has improved since 1978 for all three age groups tested and in every quartile, with the largest gains made by nine-year-olds.
- U.S. students scored near the top on the latest international assessment of reading. American fourth graders outperformed students from all other nations except Finland.
- The combined verbal and math scores on the SAT increased 19 points from 1982 to 1997, with the largest gain of 15 points occurring between 1992 and 1997.
- The average math score is at its highest level in 26 years.

Students also are taking more rigorous courses than ever—and doing better in them. The proportion of high school graduates taking the core subjects recommended in the 1983 report, “A Nation At Risk,” had increased to 52 percent by 1994, up from 14 percent in 1982 and 40 percent in 1990.

Since 1982, the percentage of graduates taking biology, chemistry, and physics has doubled, rising from ten percent in 1982 to 21 percent in 1994. With increased participation in advanced placement (AP) courses, the number of exams that students scored a passing grade of three or above has risen nearly five-fold since 1982, from 131,871 in 1982 to 635,922 in 1998.

Fewer students are dropping out. From 1982 to 1996, the dropout rate for students 16 to 24 years old fell from 14 percent to 11 percent.

Over the past decade, dropout rates for whites and blacks both have fallen substantially. For blacks, the dropout rate fell from 18.4 percent in 1982 to 13 percent in 1996—a 29 percent decrease. For whites, the rate fell from 11 percent to seven percent—a 36 percent decrease. The gap between whites and blacks in completing high school has closed. In 1995, for the first time, blacks and whites completed high school at the same rate—87 percent.

Targeted Federal Assistance Benefits Students

Education for Disadvantaged Students—Title I

The ESEA Title I program is the largest Federal investment in elementary and secondary schools. More than 11 million children in 45,000 schools with high concentrations of poverty receive Title I assistance to support local school reform, including professional development for teachers, improved curricula, greater parent involvement, and extended learning time. Title I is working effectively for the neediest schools and students (*Survey conducted by Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Minority staff*).

- At the Wrigley Elementary School in Kentucky, more than 80 percent of the students are poor. Yet, with the help of Title I, Wrigley earned the second highest achievement scores on the statewide reading test. In the same reading test evaluation, eight of the top 20 elementary schools were Title I schools. In the writing and science tests, 13 of the top 20 schools were Title I schools.
- In Baltimore County, Maryland, all but one of the 19 Title I schools increased student performance between 1993 and 1998. The success has come from Title I support for extended year programs, implementation of effective programs in reading, and intensive professional development for teachers.
- At Roosevelt High School in Dallas, Texas, where 80 percent of the students are poor, Title I funds were used to increase parent involvement, train teachers to work more effectively with parents, and make other changes to bring high standards into every classroom. Student reading scores have jumped from the 40th percentile in 1992 to the 77th percentile in 1996. During the same period, math scores jumped from the 16th to the 73rd percentile, and writing scores jumped from the 58th to the 84th percentile.
- In Baskin Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas, the number of students passing all sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills more than doubled between 1994 and 1998, from 44 percent to 94 percent. This improvement is particularly impressive because the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at Baskin increased from 89 percent in 1994 to 92 percent in 1998.

- At Baldwin Elementary School in Boston, Massachusetts, where 80 percent of the students are poor, student performance on the Stanford 9 test increased substantially from 1996-1998 by increasing teacher professional development and implementing a whole-school reform plan to raise standards and achievement for all children. In 1996, 66 percent of the third grade students scored in the lowest levels in math. In 1998, 100 percent scored in the highest levels. In 1997, 75 percent of fourth graders scored at the lowest levels in reading. In 1998, no fourth graders were at the lowest level, and 56 percent were in the highest levels.

Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program helps 14,000 school districts provide direct services to more than 40 million children to ensure that schools, and classrooms are safe and drug-free. The *Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act* is working to help ensure that schools and students are secure (Survey conducted by Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Minority staff).

- **Iowa: Strengthening Families and Preparing for Drug-Free Years programs.** The Strengthening Families and Preparing for Drug-Free Years programs are skills-training programs that address family risk and protective factors that influence youth behavior. Students in the Iowa Strengthening Families program were 30 percent less likely to have initiated drunkenness between the sixth and tenth grades than their peers. In addition, students in the Preparing for the Drug-Free Years program were 20 percent less likely to have initiated drunkenness than their peers.

- **Maryland: Here's Looking at You 2000.** The Here's Looking at You 2000 program is a research-based, skills-oriented curriculum that helps students in 29 elementary schools, ten middle schools, and seven high schools in Maryland reduce drug, alcohol, and tobacco use.

Between 1994 and 1996, sixth graders' use of tobacco declined from 4.3 percent to 3.7 percent. Eighth graders' use of tobacco declined from 26 percent to 19 percent. Sixth graders' use of beer and wine declined from 6.3 percent to 4.5 percent. Eighth graders' use of beer and wine declined from 33 percent to 24 percent. Eighth graders' use of marijuana declined from 16 percent to 11 percent.

- **Massachusetts: Student Assistance Program.** The Student Assistance Program at New Bedford Public Schools is helping to reduce absenteeism, decrease the number of incidents requiring disciplinary actions, and increase academic achievement.

At the Roosevelt and Normandin Junior High Schools, suspensions among students participating in the Student Assistance Program have decreased by 16 percent, student attendance has increased by 32 percent, and students receiving passing grades has increased by 21 percent.

- **Washington: Second Step Program.** The Second Step Program provides students in more than 500 schools in Washington State with skills and knowledge to improve empathy, control their impulses, and manage their anger.

A recent study showed that physical aggression decreased for students in the Second Step Program from the fall to spring semesters, while aggression increased among students who were not in the program. Overall, students who participated in the Second Step Program showed a 28 percent reduction in physical aggression on the playground and in the lunchroom; a 20 percent reduction in verbal hostility on the playground and in the lunchroom; and a ten percent increase in positive behaviors.

Students who did not participate in the program showed a 41 percent increase in physical aggression on the playground and in the lunchroom; and a 22 percent increase in verbal hostility on the playground and in the lunchroom.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program provides 190,000 children in 800 schools across the Nation access to safe and constructive after-school activities. Studies have shown that children who participate in quality after-school programs while their parents work have better peer relations, emotional adjustments, and conduct in schools, and have more learning opportunities and enrichment activities. (See, for example, the Department of Justice and Education Report, "Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids," 1998) The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is working to help children increase achievement and reduce incidences of destructive behavior (Survey conducted by Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Minority staff).

■ **Massachusetts: The Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative.** In collaboration with the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Police Department, the Boston Office for Children and Families, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Boston Children's Museum, and many other community-based organizations, Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston has implemented the Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative to expand and enhance the availability of after-school programs. In Boston, 33 percent of all juvenile offenses on school days occur between the hours of 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Their school-based after-school programs, serving more than 16,000 students in 42 schools, promote literacy, math, performing and creative arts, sports, technology, career development, and violence and drug reduction to curb juvenile crime.

■ **Wisconsin: The Milwaukee Project.** The Milwaukee Project partners with the Milwaukee Public Schools, law enforcement, community-based organizations, and residents to provide safe havens at neighborhood sites for children. The 8,400 youth participating in the Milwaukee Project are provided homework and tutoring assistance, recreational activities, games, arts and crafts, and computer skills.

The program has helped to reduce the crime rate in neighborhoods participating in the Milwaukee Project by providing youth with alternative activities during after-school hours. In the 15 months following the inception of the program, the crime rate dropped by 21 percent in the neighborhoods with after-school programs.

■ **Georgia: The 3:00 Project.** The 3:00 Project serves more than 750 middle school students at 17 sites throughout Georgia and focuses on three key goals: 1) provide a safe environment for children out of school; 2) encourage collaboration of community resources; and 3) improve both academic success and skill-building for students. Approximately 60 percent of students and teachers, and more than 80 percent of parents, agree that the 3:00 Project enhances students' interpersonal skills and helps students learn how to make a positive contribution to their schools and communities.

■ **Texas: The Lighted Schools Project.** The Lighted Schools Project in Waco, Texas, provides more than 650 middle school students with a safe, supervised environment during after-school hours. The program targets at-risk youth, although all middle school students can participate in free activities including, sports, crafts, special events and arts. Students have access to primary health care and

programs to enhance self-confidence, prevent violence, ward off the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, resolve conflicts, and to provide tutoring and homework assistance.

Children who participate in the Lighted Schools Project say they have a safe place to go after school, they are off the street, and it is more fun than sitting at home in front of the television. Fifty-seven percent of students at four sites improved their school attendance, and two sites experienced a 38 percent decrease in the number of participants failing two or more classes.

- **New York: Institute for Student Achievement.** The Institute for Student Achievement in six New York school districts is a school-based after-school program that provides counseling and academic assistance to middle and high school students who are struggling in school. The programs, STAR (Success Through Academic Readiness) and COMET (Children of Many Educational Talents) provide tutoring, academic enrichment activities, and computer-assisted instruction. Community service and family involvement also are key components of the after-school programs.

Every STAR student has graduated from high school, and 96 percent have gone on to college. Test scores at Hempstead High School on Long Island improved dramatically since the after-school program began, and the State removed the school from its list of low-performing schools one year ahead of schedule.

Technology Literacy Challenge Fund

As a result of education technology programs such as the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund, more schools are connected to the Internet making modern computers and technologies accessible to all students.

- Seventy-eight percent of all public schools have access to the Internet compared to 35 percent in 1994. (*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics*)
- Twenty-seven percent of all public school instructional rooms have access to the Internet compared to three percent in 1994. (*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics*)

America's Schools Face Critical Challenges

Currently, our public schools face extraordinary challenges. Too many schools are out-of-date and unsafe. Student enrollment is at record levels and will continue to rise. Too many teachers are not as well prepared as they need to be to help children meet high standards of achievement. Millions of children are unsupervised after-school every day. Democrats believe it is in our national interest to meet these challenges by working in partnership with educators, parents, business and community leaders, and officials at all levels of government to make sure that all children get a good education.

Senate Democrats have introduced **S. 7**, the *Public Schools Excellence Act*, that combines several proposals to increase student achievement and meet the critical challenges facing our schools.

School modernization. This legislation would help local communities rebuild, modernize and reduce overcrowding in more than 5,000 local public schools. The school modernization plan provides nearly \$20 billion in authority for States and local governments to issue qualified school modernization bonds, effectively paying the interest cost of school bond issues. It also modifies the existing qualified zone academy bonds program to expand funding for the bonds and include new school construction as a permissible use.

100,000 teachers—smaller classes. The bill also builds on last year's budget agreement by authorizing a six-year effort to help local school districts continue to meet the goal of hiring 100,000 new, qualified teachers to reduce class size in grades one through three. Up to 15 percent of the funds can be used to support activities such as professional development courses to improve overall teacher quality.

Quality teachers. The legislation will provide local school districts with \$1.2 billion to recruit excellent teacher candidates, retain and support promising beginning teachers, and provide veteran teachers and principals with the ongoing professional development needed to help all children meet high standards of achievement. The bill requires the full \$300 million for funding of Title II of the *Higher Education Act* to improve the initial preparation of teachers. **S. 7** also includes accountability measures to ensure improvement in the quality of the Nation's teaching force by requiring States and school districts to reduce both out-of-field placement of teachers and the number of teachers with emergency credentials.

After-school programs. In order to provide parents and their children with better choices, Democrats support tripling the funding (from \$200 million to \$600 million) for the 21st Century Learning Center Program, which gives schools funds to operate after-school and summer school programs. By expanding the program, more than one million children each year will have access to safe and constructive after-school projects that provide students with academic enrichment, tutoring, recreation and other activities. In addition, the bill provides funds for community-based after-school programs through the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

Senate Democrats Work to Strengthen Public Schools

Senate Democrats believe that as we approach the new millennium, it is critical that national leaders step up to the challenge and work to improve and strengthen our public schools. In an economy where six out of ten jobs will require sophisticated computer skills, and where the relationship between income and education level is clear, it is imperative the national leaders commit to improve the education of the nearly 50 million American children who rely on public education. **S. 7**, the *Public Schools Excellence Act*, is a comprehensive approach that will improve student achievement and help ensure America remains competitive in the global economy.